

Housing Committee  
February 28, 2023, 11 a.m  
Hearing on Senate Bill 4  
Written testimony of Peter Benner

To Chairs Moore and Luxenberg, and the members of the Housing Committee in support of Senate Bill 4, with some modifications.

My name is Peter Benner. I live in West Hartford and am a member of the housing team of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance--an organization of almost 50 congregations of diverse faiths in the Hartford area. GHIAA represents many the constituents of Hartford area legislators to advocate for fair and equitable treatment for all our residents.

Because we are in the midst of a housing and rent escalation crisis, **the need to take action during this legislative session is urgent and real.**

This crisis is driving an increase in homelessness and suffering to the residents of our communities, most importantly families and children—resulting in increased costs to the state and cities.

There are various reasons to pass this bill, importantly with the following modifications:

- The cap should be 3%. Four percent plus inflation is just too burdensome and, most importantly, would not accomplish the desired goal.
- The bill should cover apartments in between tenants so landlords don't have the incentive to evict tenants in order to accomplish a rent increase that would otherwise be prohibited.
- The bill should expand good cause eviction protections cover all tenants, so tenants are not at the destabilizing risk of losing their home despite compliance with the lease.

I will urge passage, as modified, relying here on four primary points:

**FIRST, the claim that rent stabilization will result in a decline in available affordable rental housing by discouraging new construction or encouraging conversion to condominiums is simply not true.**

Throughout the country, research and actual experience shows that rent stabilization policies do not diminish the availability of affordable rental housing. If you have not, I urge the committee to review the literature that supports this conclusion. We can provide the Committee with these resources if that would be helpful. Experience shows that rent caps are the most direct and immediate way for state government to implement a policy that preserves affordable rental housing stock. Without that housing, the state's economy will suffer—which is well documented.

**SECOND, homelessness is increasing statewide. Through this bill, the legislature has the opportunity, and indeed the mandate, to create greater housing stability. In the face of the crisis that all acknowledge exists, why would you let this opportunity pass by and allow for deepening housing insecurity, rising rents, and further displacement? Protecting renters, and ensuring they have the stability they need to thrive, is critical for renters and their families—and the future of the Connecticut economy. To individuals and families, housing is a human right providing to the family unit and to the community. Beyond that, local and state government save money and resources since residents are more likely to sustain health, well-being, and economic success. The alternative is loss of housing through eviction or abandonment. But without a change in course, millions more low income renters will be**

squeezed by unaffordable rents and uprooted by eviction and displacement. While the current crisis reaches across race and income, communities of color have suffered the most. Not only are our lower income residents much more likely to be renters, but they face an ownership housing market that rests on discriminatory policies and practices. We hope to address that problem by passage of the complementary Fair Share bill also scheduled for hearing on February 28. More immediately, however, relief in the rental market and reducing the incidence of homelessness can be achieved by passage of Senate Bill 4.

**THIRD,** from a personal perspective, I am an attorney and have spent a lot of time in the Hartford Housing Court. I have witnessed cases in which tenants have been subject to eviction for nonpayment of rent they cannot afford because of an excessive rent increase. The deck is stacked against them. Even if represented by counsel, there is nothing they can do to fend off eviction due to an increase imposed by a corporate out of state landlord. This is not the kind of process or policy we want in Connecticut, as it does not serve any of us well. Keeping rents to a reasonable and manageable level is simply the right thing to do before, if unchecked, the system may break down altogether.

**FOURTH,** this bill **does not disregard the interests of landlords**, such as those who testified last week in opposition to HB 6588. Landlords, particularly corporations from out of state, have been coming into Connecticut and escalating rents dramatically, which is a prime cause of the crisis. They are fully capable of dealing with a reasonable limit to increases while still maintaining profit. For more local “mom & pop” landlords, there remains opportunity to work

with their tenants to address the interests of both. This bill is targeted at the out of state corporations and is part of an overall solution to the current housing affordability and availability crisis.

I strongly encourage passage of Senate Bill 4 as an important step toward maintaining affordable rental housing.

Thank you.